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IN THE MIQUELLE TRADITION

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March 14, 2019

Mr. Bob Gambale, Chair
Zoning Board of Appeals
Town of Ipswich
c/o Building Department
Town Hall
25 Green Street
Ipswich, Massachusetts 01938

RE: Essex Pastures -- 26, 36, 38, 42 and 44 Essex Road
Architectural and Design Enhancements

Dear Chairman Gambale:

As a follow-up to the Applicant's last hearing before the Board, the central issues raised were the proposed layout, height, massing and style of the Project buildings. Accordingly, the Applicant and its Project Team have undertaken considerable efforts over these past number of weeks to respond to these issues as outlined in the letter from Board member Robert Clocker, dated January 17, 2019, comments made by the Board's peer review architect, Cliff Boehmer of Davis Square Architects, as well as the comment letter from the Ipswich Design Review Board, dated September 28, 2019. This letter also responds to comments made through the several meetings with both Mr. Boehmer and Mr. Clocker over the past several months. In order to respond to the "key design issues" that have been articulated in these letters and meetings, we have assembled a 3D model of the proposed residential/mixed use community showing the proposed building, layout and scale of both on-site buildings as well as existing nearby buildings on the abutting properties in order to more clearly define the scale of buildings within the context of the immediate neighborhood.

The following topics are the main themes outlined in the letters and meetings described above, as well as how the project design team has responded to address these main themes:

Specific items shown in the model include:

- **Height and Density**– the proposed height should generally be comparable with surrounding buildings.

Response: The most significant change made to the proposed buildings includes the elimination of all the 4 story buildings and the reduction of all buildings to 3 stories with pitched roofs (4:12). This has allowed us to significantly lower building height. While the measured building heights vary with the existing grade, the average building heights are now approximately 39'6" from finished grade where the tallest buildings were previously 4 stories and up to 50 feet in height. Please note that the maximum building height as defined under the Zoning Bylaw is 45 feet and 3 stories within the Highway Business (HB) Zoning District and is 37 feet and 3 stories within the Rural Residence A (RRA) Zoning District. (We have placed the Clubhouse in the Residential District and it is under 28 feet to the ridge.) As a result, we feel that building height overall is consistent with multifamily and other building types throughout town, and the height of all the multifamily buildings is consistent with the townhouse buildings height as they are more context sensitive in terms of scale and height. We feel this project design adjustment which reduces the number of stories and height represents a substantial concession and dramatic change to the originally proposed building height and massing and makes for a better design within the context of the surrounding neighborhood. Moreover, as a result in the reduction of building massing, the number of units, originally proposed at 194 and then increased to 200 residential units as a result of the introduction of the mixed use building, has now been reduced to a total of 172 residential units, thereby reducing parking needs and related impervious surfaces, while at the same time reducing potential traffic impacts. These adjustments have also led to the reconfiguration of the parking which includes a total of 326 spaces (3 van accessible spaces and 8 standard accessible spaces), including a total of 22 spaces for the ground floor commercial use to be contained within the mixed-use building. As a result, a total of 304 parking spaces, or over an average of 1.77 spaces per residential unit, are provided at the site which is well in excess of the 1.5 spaces per multifamily residential unit required under the zoning bylaw. This parking space count excludes additional parking spaces which could be accommodated within the driveways of the townhouse units.

- **Proportion** – how building elements provide character and neighborhood compatibility.

Response: The buildings have been located to provide both neighborhood compatibility and character. For example, the community building, which has been located approximately 150 feet from Essex Road, is situated to be adjacent to the closest off-site residential dwelling along Essex Road in order to maintain a consistent scale of buildings along the southeasterly section of the site. The clubhouse area has also incorporated a bus stop location for school students so that there is a safe location for the pickup and drop-off of students within the site. Similarly, townhouses located along Essex Road have been located next to existing on-site buildings to provide consistent, smaller-scale and proportions along Essex Road. As a result, transitioning from smaller to a taller mixed use building in the center of the site, and

then transitioning to a lower height to the rear of the site creates a stronger hierarchy of building layout, scale and proportions throughout the Project.

- **Scale** – the scale should be compatible with the surrounding architecture and landscaping context, and compatibility of different building scales or sizes may be addressed by building typology, orientation, roof lines, setbacks and position of buildings on site. Soften the rigidity and place smaller buildings along Essex Road. Consider stacking buildings in center of site as screening for the other buildings to the rear. Consider alternating building footprints.

Response: The project team has undertaken significant efforts to respond to matters of scale. For example, the smaller-scale community building has been re-oriented and repositioned in a manner following the curvilinear entrance to the community. Similarly, the townhouse buildings both to the northwest along Essex Road and northeast to the rear of the site have been repositioned to follow the bend of the driveways to form a consistent symmetry of building repositioning. The modified curvilinear drives also serve as additional traffic calming measures. Moreover, the mixed-use building in the center of the site provides for varying building articulation to break up the massing both vertically in design, as well as horizontally with the introduction of canopy trim and signage for the ground floor commercial uses. The scale of the buildings to the rear of the site have also been repositioned to break up the rigid, linear placement of buildings so that the buildings follow the topography in a gently curving design. The proposed clubhouse facades have been carefully articulated to present traditional scaled elements that also appear in the larger structures to create architectural symmetry throughout the site. The 3D model is a good representation of this design.

- **Architectural and Site Details** – little qualitative information has been provided on these items such as trim around entrances and windows, exterior cladding materials, roof types, outdoor lighting, fencing and landscape buffers.

Response: Buildings will have traditional trim and horizontal siding with architectural shingles on hipped roofs, similar to other architectural details commonly found in Ipswich. The Project Civil Engineer has also adjusted on site details such as paving, curbing, walks and drainage design which is described in a separate memorandum from Bayside Engineering.

- **Façade Design and Articulation** – how the building facades relate to the context including materials, colors and depths, and how the massing can be broken down by varying façade treatments and articulation.

Response: The model shows how the proposed buildings are composed of elements that are similar in scale to some of the more prominent historical structures found in other neighborhoods of the Town of Ipswich. The strong cornice line is found in many of the traditional structures in all parts of Ipswich. The facades of the buildings are articulated and varied in such a way so as

to break down the massing, and to create varying depths, in order to provide visual differentiation. Additionally, the hip roof design of these buildings serves to both provide a varying roofline providing visual interest, and also serves to enclose rooftop mechanicals to mitigate any potential visual or noise impacts. Building colors will be selected to provide for a consistent coloring regimen which will include traditional colors to blend into the surrounding neighborhood.

- **Shape** – how the buildings relate to each other and create outdoor spaces.

Response: Buildings have been reoriented so that they are located in such a way so as to maximize recreational and open space opportunities. The driveway to the rear of the site has been realigned to maintain the integrity and continuity of the centrally-located common area. The buildings surrounding the common area greenspace, including the buildings to the rear of the site as well as the centrally located mixed use building, serve as bookends and provide a detailed edge to shape an attractive and functional outdoor space. As a result, the redesign of the common area results in the creation of a centrally located open space area of approximately 57,969 square feet (or over 1.3 acres). This central common area has been shaped to provide for a variety of recreational uses for residents of varying ages, including an outdoor patio and gazebo located centrally to the rear of the site and away from Essex Road; thereby providing for a safe, secure, and centrally located common for the use and enjoyment of all community residents and enhancing the sense of community.

- **Design Treatments of the Edge; Setback and Screening** – how spaces are defined, activities are articulated, and project boundaries are treated.

Response: Effort has been made to orient the buildings and roads to moderate the building massing, accentuate open space, respect human scale and enhance the pedestrian environment. Existing wooded areas on the property will remain to the extent practicable to maintain an existing treed canopy. Off-site wooded areas on adjacent properties are represented in the model to provide an accurate depiction of existing screening. Additional visual screening and buffering designed to provide a consistent visual green buffer between the properties to the northeast are depicted along the northern and eastern property lines to maintain a year-round buffer consisting of dense evergreen plantings, and plantings are proposed that will fill in at the low, middle and upper levels of the horizon. Canopy trees will be planted as necessary to round out potential screening gaps along these boundaries. The new mixed use commercial and residential building located in the center of the site provides a refreshed commercial front to the entire property along Essex Road to complement the project's residential uses. Buildings will respect the setbacks required under the Ipswich Zoning By-Law. Additional screening will be provided in these setback areas, as depicted in the updated civil plans prepared by Bayside Engineering. Proposed parking garages located along the site perimeter are designed to serve as supplemental visual, light and noise barrier screening between the site and abutting uses and are designed to be

compatible with building architecture. Interior landscaping will be located to provide year-round visual interest with a variety of trees, shrubs and other plantings. Internal drives will be planted with street trees in order to create the effect of a tree-lined roadway with pedestrian walkways providing pedestrian connections to buildings with connections to the sidewalk system along Essex Road, and are designed to provide a neighborhood feel to the community. Lighting will be pedestrian-scale and will include cutoffs to ensure no off-site glare, and all pedestrian furniture such as benches, and plantings will be compatible with the architectural design and style of the structures to enhance the character of the surrounding area. Drives will be wide enough to accommodate pedestrian, vehicular and bicycle access throughout the site and to Essex Road to facilitate pedestrian and bicycle connectivity. The open space area will be defined by a densely buffered mix of plantings strategically located to provide buffering as visual interest. Those areas of the site along the perimeter which will remain open space will be planted with drought-tolerant native grasses, perennials and wildflowers that do not need frequent mowing or watering. These open space areas will provide a more natural edge to the site perimeter particularly near wetland resource areas and accompanying buffer zones.

We look forward to our next hearing before the Board on March 14 to present the model for your review and comment.

Sincerely

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